

Teaching Trigger Control

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Proper finger placement on the trigger.

As a trainer, you will soon learn that one of the hardest skills (yet one of the most important) to teach new shooters is trigger control.

The shooter must learn to keep the sights on the target while smoothly moving the trigger to the rear until the gun discharges. This process occurs even in high speed defensive shooting, although the time it takes to complete is compressed.

Larry Vickers, retired Special Operations soldier, former Delta Force member and world class firearms instructor, once said, "Why is the rifle so much easier to shoot than a pistol? Easy. The rifle weighs more than its trigger pull, while the handgun weighs less than the weight of the trigger pull." That is a truly brilliant summation of the whole

problem. If you have an eight-pound rifle with a two-pound trigger, it's easy to shoot it well. Unfortunately, we often have a two-pound pistol with an eight-pound trigger pull, hence the difficulty. Thus, proper trigger technique becomes vital.

First let's look at the different phases of trigger operation. Manipulation of the semi-automatic pistol's trigger actually consists of four separate and distinct phases and each phase impacts our accuracy. These phases in sequence are:

Why is the rifle so much easier to shot than a pistol?

Contact:

The "pad" or fingerprint of the shooter's index finger should contact the center of the face of the trigger. The trigger finger should not touch the frame of the gun. Ideally, the only place the trigger finger should contact the pistol is on the face of the trigger.

Slack:

Semi-automatic pistols have "slack" or "pre-engagement travel" built into the action. This is a bit of rearward movement in the trigger, prior to the actual trigger pull. The shooter can feel a distinct difference in the amount of finger pressure needed to take up the slack as opposed to that pressure needed to fire the piece. As the gun is brought to bear on the target the trigger finger contacts the trigger and removes the "slack." The slack is taken up so that the trigger finger feels the resistance of the trigger pull.



Proper trigger finger contact. Note the gap between the shooter's finger and the pistol's frame.

Press:

Beware of semantics. As an instructor, the words you use form images in your

students' subconscious and this drives their actions. For instance, if you tell your student to "squeeze" the trigger he will likely squeeze his entire hand while moving the trigger. We call this "milking the trigger." This results in low misses on the target. As the lower fingers tighten their grip, the barrel is pulled downward as the gun fires. Instead, we want to "press" the trigger, with steady rearward pressure. We hold the gun with our hand; we fire the gun with our trigger finger. The student must learn to use the trigger finger independently of the rest of the hand while maintaining a constant, consistent, unchanging grip on the pistol. When enough pressure to the trigger is applied to disengage the sear, the gun fires.

It may help to describe the trigger as the pistol's "gas pedal." Using the analogy of a car (which all students are familiar with) the magazine is the gas tank, the front sight is the green traffic light, and the trigger is the accelerator. When you see the green light, you apply steady, increasing pressure to the accelerator until the bullet takes off smoothly.

If you stomp the gas pedal, the car takes off jerkily and under less control. It's the same with the bullet.

All one needs to do to play a concerto on a piano is to hit the right keys in the right order at the right time. It's a simple process, but it takes practice.

Re-Set:

Once the gun fires, the shooter must maintain contact with the trigger. Many newbies will have the tendency to take their finger completely off the trigger the instant the gun fires and this must be corrected. As soon as the shooter sees the front sight begin to lift, that bullet has exited the barrel and is in flight. The shooter can no longer do anything to affect that shot, so he should forget it and start concentrating on the next shot! The first step is to relax the trigger finger's pressure just enough to let the trigger return forward to its reset point. That is normally a really short distance and there is usually an audible and tactile "click" when the trigger resets. There is no need to let the trigger go farther forward than that. Once the trigger is re-set, the shooter can begin working on the delivery of the next shot.

Double-action revolver triggers do not have slack in them, but otherwise the process is the same. It is important with the revolver to move the trigger all the way to the rear to fire the gun, then let it roll back all the way out before starting on the next trigger pull. The revolver trigger must go all the way forward or you can skip a chamber or even lock up the action, a process called "short stroking." The double-action trigger should be pressed all the way through in one smooth motion.

All one needs to do to play a concerto on a piano is to hit the right keys in the right order at the right time. It's a simple process, but it takes practice. All one needs to do to hit anything with a pistol is to keep the sights aligned on the intended point of impact while you work the trigger smoothly to the rear. Again, it is a simple concept, but it takes practice.